

Taking citizenship in education further

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The Education Council supports the government's decision to leave the running of citizenship education to schools as much as possible. This decision fits well in the Dutch system of freedom of education, where schools have the autonomy to decide on the educational content and the approach to teaching methods. However, the Education Council believes that the common core of citizenship education should be better described and embodied in legislation and regulations than is currently the case. The further development of citizenship education lies with schools, but the government could take a more active role than it currently does. To achieve this, the Education Council has formulated three recommendations for primary and secondary education, special needs and secondary special needs education, and senior secondary vocational education.

Recommendation 1: ensure that schools and teachers are given support

Schools deserve to be supported in the work they do on citizenship education. The Education Council considers it important the government and education authorities are explicit about the immense value of citizenship education in their communications with and about schools and the education community. Making a contribution to the citizenship of young people is one of the core tasks of education. It should also be made clear that schools do not (and should not) have to do things alone. The school shares its citizenship mandate with the family, the neighbourhood, associations, the government and other social organisations. There is also a task here for teacher training programmes and teacher trainers. Furthermore, schools could be supported by making their intentions and their current actions explicit. It would be desirable to have support modalities made available at a national level. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science could better highlight successful developments in citizenship education. Finally, schools need time to properly shape their citizenship education.

Recommendation 2: provide a stimulus for systematic expertise development

An important barrier to achieving high quality citizenship education is the lack of expertise on what approach is suitable for efforts to achieve specific citizenship competencies and for which pupils. For the further development of citizenship education, the Education Council considers systematic expertise development to be essential. The Education Council advises the Minister to find or create a network organisation in which schools, education supporting institutions and research institutions work together, and to facilitate them when implementing the intended development and research agenda.

Recommendation 3: offer schools a substantive compass

In the view of the Education Council, the substantive core of citizenship education is learning to function in a democratic society. This core could be better embodied in the core objectives of the various educational sectors than is currently the case. It is also recommended to make the relationship between the core objectives and the goal setting for citizenship education explicit in each new decision on the core objectives for a sector. Additionally, the Education Council advises the Minister to simplify goal setting and to regulate for schools to render an account of the quality of their citizenship education in the school plan. Finally, it must always be clear that the social work placements in secondary education form part of the citizenship mandate of schools.